



CASS CITY'S Louise Ponder works to match adoptive families with children in need of homes. Pictured above is one of those families - Tim and Jessie Williams of Caro with their adopted children, Craig, 17, (back row) and (front row, from left) brothers Brian, 11, and Travis, 10. Also pictured is Tuscola County Probate and Family Court Judge Wallace Kent Jr., who confirmed the adoption during Michigan's first Adoption Day, Nov. 25.

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Ponder: adoptions 'cream of the crop' in social work

By Tom Montgomery

Louis Ponder admits it's a real challenge to find adoptive parents for every child — especially older children — in need of the security and love a family can provide.

Still, the Cass City woman enjoys her job as director of foster care and adoptions at Teen Ranch, Marlette, just the same. And, she says, days like Tuesday, Nov. 25, make all of the work more than worthwhile.

Ponder worked with Tim and Jessie Williams of Caro in adopting 3 children — Craig, 17, and brothers Brian, 11, and Travis, 10. The adoption was one of several confirmed by Tuscola Probate and Family Court Judge Wallace Kent Jr., last week in conjunction with Michigan's first Adoption Day.

The event was established as a joint project of the Family Independence Agency (FIA) and the courts in Michigan to make the public more aware of the estimated 1,800 children in the state who have come from homes where they were neglected or abused, and who don't yet have an adoptive home.

The Williams' new children all fall into that category. Each was placed in foster care due to neglect, according to Ponder, who said the couple has served as foster parents to all 3 children for some time.

"They've got a long history of fostering because they had fostered in another county. They've been with us for about 6 years. We've done a total of 7 adoptions for them,

and they're going to be adopting an eighth," Ponder noted.

"They would be your ideal foster parents," she added. "They're always willing to take in a challenged child. They'll take in kids that no one else will, and they just work miracles. They really do."

Convincing families to adopt older children can be a big challenge.

"These are special needs kids," Ponder said. "They're children that you wouldn't find an adoptive home for because of their age. They're children who are probably older than 2 — most are 7 to 15 years of age — who may or may not have (special) medical, cognitive or emotional needs."

However, a number of older children, like those adopted by the Williams, end up being adopted by their foster parents because of the bonds that develop over time, said Ponder, who has worked at Teen Ranch for the past 4 years.

"I currently supervise both the Marlette and Port Huron offices, and I do adoptions on the side. I wear many hats there," she said.

"I think we've averaged about 50 adoptions this year, and that would include international, domestic and special needs adoptions," added Ponder, who earned her Bachelor of Social Work Degree from Saginaw Valley State University in 1998.

The Cass City resident also has years of personal experience on her resume. She and husband Tom have adopted 2 special needs children — Shaylee, 4, and Sherry Snear, who is now 19 and married. The couple also served as foster parents, taking in 36 children, ranging in age from 7 months to 17 years, over a 7-year period.

"Having been a foster parent and an adoptive parent, I can identify with a lot of their struggles," she said of prospective adoptive parents.

As director of foster care and adoptions, Ponder's duties focus on ensuring a smooth transition for both the adoptive family and the child.

"I study the homes and I do what's called a child assessment on each child. It's like a history from birth to current of where they've been

and where they are now," she explained. "And then we take the family and the child and we match them up and facilitate the adoption."

Ponder acknowledged there's a lot of satisfaction when everything falls together.

"It's fun," she said. "Adoptions are the cream of the crop in the social work field."

Judge Kent shared that sentiment last week.

"Presiding over adoptions is the best part of my job as a family court judge. Usually, when people come to court, somebody leaves unhappy.

In an adoption, everyone involved has a big smile on their face," he said. "Parents are gladdened to have a child to love, and children who are old enough to understand are relieved to have parents who will love them unconditionally and will treat them with kindness."

Kent added, "Hopefully, this first annual Adoption Day will encourage more people to explore adoption for needy children as an option so that in the future no child goes without a permanent, loving home."